

**Oral Statement of TSA Administrator John S. Pistole
Before the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Transportation Security
March 14, 2013**

As prepared for delivery

Good afternoon Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Richmond, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the risk-based security changes TSA is making to better protect our nation's transportation systems and the traveling public from acts of terrorism, while facilitating the movement of people and goods. I also want to thank the many members of the Subcommittee for your support for the risk-based approach we are using to carry out our transportation security responsibilities.

Given my recent decision to remove certain items from the prohibited items list beginning April 25th, the subject of this hearing is quite timely. I look forward to discussing with the Subcommittee this most recent application of the risk-based approach to transportation security as well as other risk-based changes TSA has implemented over the past 18 months.

Given the recent concerns expressed by some regarding my decision to remove certain small pocket knives and some types of sporting equipment from the prohibited items list, I'd like to address this issue up front.

In early 2011, I requested a team of TSA Security experts to assess items on what we call the Prohibited Items List, and to make recommendations whether we should modify the list in any way. My decision to change the prohibited items list that I announced on March 5th involved a careful analysis of several different factors. First, we evaluated the latest intelligence and threat information from the U.S. Intelligence and Law Enforcement Communities that is, how are terrorists trying to attack us and how has that changed since 9/11. Second, we looked at how our current policy aligned with international security standards. Third, we assessed how a change to permit an item would impact on our security operations and the traveling public. Fourth, we evaluated whether the change would increase the risk of a successful terrorist attack to bring down an aircraft. Fifth, we considered the potential increased risk to FAMS, passengers, or flight crew. Finally, in view of all of the above, we deliberated on whether it remained necessary to continue to restrict the traveling public from carrying the item aboard a commercial aircraft, basically the “hassle factor” that TSA has come to represent for so many Americans.

The deliberative approach we took, and my final decision, is consistent with the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission for TSA to “set risk based

priorities” to protect transportation assets, and to “give priority attention to improving the ability of screening checkpoints to detect explosives on PAX.”

While I cannot go into specific details in this open hearing setting, we do know from the Intelligence Community that terrorists such as Al Qaeda and their affiliate and inspired groups remain focused on attacking commercial aviation. We also know that the threat to aviation from these groups is from explosive devices such as the non-metallic bomb used by the so called “underwear bomber” on Christmas day 2009 the toner-cartridge printer bombs from Yemen placed on two cargo aircraft destined for Chicago, and the improved “next generation” underwear device also from Yemen, recovered by a foreign intelligence service in April 2012.

While the ultimate goal of a terrorist may be a successful attack within the US against a US commercial aircraft, changes to aviation security since 2001 have resulted in attacks emanating from overseas aboard aircraft flying to the US. Over the past several years, TSA has placed a great deal of emphasis not only on multiple layers of security here in the U.S. but on raising international aviation security standards and achieving harmony among the international community.

In August 2010, the International Civil Aviation Organization changed aviation security standards to permit knives with a blade length of 6 cm or less to be carried in the cabin of aircraft. Since that global change, and excluding US

originating passengers, there have been more than 5 billion commercial airline passengers worldwide allowed to carry these knives. We are unaware of any report of a security incident aboard any commercial aircraft worldwide involving these items.

With hardened cockpit doors, better identification of individual passengers against terrorist watch lists, other security changes, and the demonstrated willingness of passengers to intervene to assist flight crew during a security incident, it is the judgment of many security experts worldwide, which I agree with, a small pocket knife is simply not going to result in the catastrophic failure of an aircraft. An improvised explosive device will. Over the past decade, TSA has identified and prevented more than 3.5 million small knives of the type I decided to allow. And we know from internal convert testing, searching for these items, which will not blow up an aircraft, can distract our security officers from focusing on the components of an explosive device.

Since my announcement last week, there have been a number of inaccurate reports in the media regarding the specific type of knife to be allowed. In general, what we are talking about are small pocket knives and other common items such as a cork screw with a folding blade 6 cm, or 2.36 inches or less in overall length, Fixed blade knives, blades with locking mechanisms, widths over ½ inch or knives

with molded grip handles will still be prohibited. Similarly, box cutters and other razor knives remain prohibited. Of note, the type of knife we will permit is far more restrictive than international security standards, what is currently permitted to be brought into Federal buildings across the country, or what is allowed to be brought into the U.S. Capitol building.

I clearly understand the concerns expressed by flight attendants, Federal Air Marshals, members of Congress and others with respect to the increased risk to passengers and flight attendants. In fact, my decision to be more restrictive in the specific type of knife permitted was based on extensive discussion with my leadership team and concerns raised by Federal Air Marshals. Similar concerns were expressed in 2005 when a previous TSA Administrator changed the prohibited items list to allow small scissors less than 4 inches in length and screw drivers less than 7 inches in length. Contrary to claims that we would see a rash of assaults on flight attendants and passengers using these items – that simply has not been the case. The GAO did a follow up assessment and reported that there had been no security incidents where these items had been used aboard an aircraft. That fact remains accurate through today and underscores the point that in aviation security, it is not the object per se that is dangerous but the individual who intends to use that object to inflict harm that presents the danger.

There are many other changes TSA is making to strengthen our capabilities to keep terrorists off commercial aircraft. Many of these changes reflect risk-based security initiatives I began implementing 18 months ago in an effort to shift away from the one-size-fits-all approach to passenger screening adopted in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Similar to my decision to change the prohibited items list, these initiatives reflect analysis of the best available intelligence and sound risk-management principles.

I am happy to discuss these initiatives with you, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.